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SUBJECT: CODEL HAGEL MEETINGS IN KSA FOCUS ON IRAQ, IRAN
AND ISRAEL/PA

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael Gfoeller for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) On November 30 and December 1, Senator Chuck Hagel (R-NE) led a delegation including Senator Tom Carper (D-DE) and Representative Ellen Tauscher (D-CA) to the first Senate-level visit to Saudi Arabia in over two years. The delegation received a warm welcome in meetings with King Abdullah bin Abd al-Aziz, Crown Prince Sultan bin Abd al-Aziz and Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal. In addition, the delegation also met during their stay with the Assistant Minister of Petroleum, Abdulaziz bin Salman, addressed an American Business Group breakfast, and convened a press roundtable. The three main official meetings focused largely on developments in Iraq, Iran's regional role, and Israel/Palestinian issues. The CODEL explained their seven-country visit through the Middle East was intended to gauge local perceptions of developments. The Saudi leadership, while troubled by continuing violence in Iraq, emphasized the U.S. responsibility to bring stability to and counter Iranian influence in Iraq, and pledged to do what they could to help. The Saudis also showed surprising receptivity to a revived Roadmap process in light of PM Sharon's recent defection from Likud and declaration to pursue a peaceful way forward. The Saudi Majles al-Shura Secretary General, Sheikh Saleh, joined the group for their

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official meetings, and the Majles encouraged the delegation to sustain contacts between the respective legislative bodies. End summary.

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Iraq: Still in Turmoil but Optimism Growing
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12. (C) The King expressed his dismay over continuing loss of life - both Iraqi and American - in Iraq; a feeling echoed by the Crown Prince and Foreign Minister. All leaders, however, urged the U.S. not to withdraw forces or lose focus until Iraq was stabilized. The King, in typically grand terminology, emphasized that settlement in Iraq would be impossible without justice prevailing first. The Crown Prince was more specific. He explained that Iraq was different from other Arab countries in that it was divided between Shi'a, Sunni, and Kurds. This, perhaps, made achieving unity more complicated, but he urged the legislators to use American power to help make Iraqis feel united. In response to Senator Hagel's view that a key to stabilizing Iraq after the December 15 elections was ensuring positive engagement by regional countries, the Crown Prince said that the KSA was against intervention in the internal affairs of others, but that this does not mean that Saudi Arabia would not assist financially and morally. What Iraq needs, he continued, was assurances to the Iraqi people that they would be ruling themselves.

13. (C) The Foreign Minister provided the most detailed analysis on Iraq. He began by updating the delegation on the Cairo Iraq Reconciliation Conference of November 18-20. FM Al-Faisal noted that all of Iraq's factions - and a broad array were present in Cairo - were now more aware of the potential for Iraq's dismemberment without active engagement to cease sectarian conflict. If only the Shia and Sunni in Iraq could resolve their differences, a majority of Iraq would be committed to unity. With these two Arab elements of the Iraqi population in place, it would be possible to form an army, erect a government, and allow the U.S. to finish its mission in Iraq. FM Al-Faisal was now more hopeful - after all parties had gathered "under one roof and at one table" and talked - of a stable political process moving forward. While he was now confident that the Sunnis would participate fully, he emphasized again that the SAG wants to maintain an "equal distance" from all parties, as any perception that the Saudis were advocating the Sunni position would destroy the entire enterprise.

14. (C) In response to Senator Hagel's question on the importance of the final resolution from the Cairo meeting advocating the withdrawal of U.S. forces, FM al-Faisal replied that he did not view the reference to American

withdrawal as negative as the U.S. itself wanted to withdraw under the right conditions. In his personal opinion, however, he noted that the U.S. should consider increasing troop levels in the short term to ensure the political process concludes successfully. This, he concluded, would make the overall period U.S. troops were needed in Iraq shorter. In response to Senator Carper's question on the progress of Iraqi security forces and prospects for their self-sufficiency, al-Faisal replied that a political settlement must precede the formation of an effective Iraqi army. If the Iraqi military was divided along sectarian lines, and the people did not trust the army to forego acts of reprisal for past wrongs, the army would lack the will and capacity to keep the peace and defend the nation. FM al-Faisal was optimistic on the prospect of creating a capable Iraqi army built upon settlement of sectarian issues. Of all the Arab states, Iraq had the best army, with a good officer corps, and he noted that such an able force could be created again. Without a political settlement first, however, he saw the security situation - and the process of creating an effective, legitimate army - remaining "stalemate." On perhaps his most optimistic note, he suggested that, once the army is established, the problem of terrorism in Iraq will "wither away."

15. (C) The Foreign Minister closed by reemphasizing the need for a political settlement as a condition precedent to further progress and avoiding Iraq's "dismemberment". The intent of the Constitutional scholars of Iraq's Constitution - like those of the U.S. Constitution - was to avoid a return to tyranny. What the political settlement must do is to counter the risk of disintegration inherent in the enhanced freedoms contained in the Constitution. The King also noted the importance of America taking an informed approach to the complexities of Iraqi society and politics. He cautioned the delegation that America should "deploy its power and wealth wisely", and while he recognized that American interests in Iraq are noble, he added that one way to avoid problems is to understand well the circumstances involved and combine such nuanced understanding with a commitment to justice.

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Iran: Reconciliation Initiative
Amidst Continued Concerns Over Iraq
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16. (C) In response to the delegation's request for Saudi views on Iran, the King shared that he had met on November 26 with Ali Velayati, International Affairs Advisor to the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei. (Note: Velayati served as Foreign Minister from 1981-1997 and ran for President in 2005.) The King noted that Velayati's visit as an emissary of the Supreme Leader represented the first such visit ever to the Kingdom. The King added that he had discussed a broad range of issues, and that Velayati had told him that Iran wanted to broaden and deepen its relations with Saudi Arabia. The King recalled that KSA-Iran ties had flourished under former Iranian presidents Rafsanjani (1989-1997) and Khatami (1997-2005), and that he hoped the new President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, would be more sensible than early indications might suggest. The King recounted that Velayati had proposed the formation of a joint bilateral committee to address all aspects of Saudi-Iranian relations. The King accepted this proposal, and appointed FM Saud al-Faisal to work with Velayati as co-Chairs of this joint committee. The King concluded by noting that Velayati was unwilling to discuss Iran's current relations with Iraq in any detail during their meeting.

17. (C) The Crown Prince also adopted a slightly less adversarial tone regarding Iran compared with recent meetings. While emphasizing continued SAG concerns of Iranian infiltration into Iraq, and calling on the U.S. to prevent this, the Crown Prince added that Iran was "our friend". That said, the Crown Prince added that, even as a friend, Iran must "remember its place". The Foreign Minister further detailed the evolving Saudi view of Iran's regional role. In response to a question from Senator Hagel regarding Iran's potential involvement in post Iraqi election regional security arrangement, al-Faisal also began by emphasizing that current Iranian policies in Iraq were a source of bilateral friction. The FM said the SAG had incontrovertible evidence of negative Iranian involvement in Iraq and recounted that he had shared this view with GOI emissary Velayati during his visit, and that the King had been frank in telling Velayati that the SAG was disturbed by Iran's current actions in Iraq. Surprisingly, al-Faisal recalled, Velayati welcomed the SAG's views, noting that "he wanted to hear from us". Regardless of possibly improved bilateral communications, al-Faisal reaffirmed that the SAG was aware that Iran was sending money, people and officials into Southern Iraq and that Southern Iraqi official activities were now conducted in both Arabic and Persian. Al-Faisal concluded his response by saying he hoped that a sense of community among Iraqis could avoid a confrontation over these developments.

18. (C) Later on in the discussion, al-Faisal returned to the issue of Iran in response to a delegation question on possible ways forward on Iraq. Al-Faisal suggested that the U.S. and regional parties must "keep Iran engaged" because "disregarding the Iranians will not make them go away". Al-Faisal added that he was not advising accommodation, rather he advocated a policy of facing the Iranians with the truth. For example, he continued, the Iranian activities in Iraq and their development of WMD were both destabilizing to the region. He suggested the U.S. and Saudi Arabia work together to convince Iran to accept the establishment of WMD-free zone in the Middle East.

19. (C) Prince Al-Faisal noted that Iran was a very old and highly civilized country with a very proud people, but lamented that "too much pride sometimes leads to flawed policy, and this has happened with Iran." While he described Iran as, unfortunately, an "enigma" and a "country of extremes" whose future actions were difficult to predict, he suggested maintaining pressure on the Iranian government to adopt a more peaceful posture. He recounted that the new Iranian President, Ahmadinejad, had begun his term with a very negative approach on foreign policy, but that the Supreme Leader had maneuvered to keep him "out of power" and that Khamenei was "tired of Ahmadinejad's fanaticism." Al-Faisal concluded by suggesting hopefully that such a marginalized figure, who has after three months in office still been unable to form a cabinet, may not have an opportunity to implement his declared aggressive policies. (Comment: Nonetheless, President Ahmadinejad traveled to Mecca on December 7-8 as the Iranian representative to the Extraordinary Islamic Summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Ahmadinejad again repeated the strident and aggressive tones of his UNGA address at the OIC, when he took additional swipes at Israel and called the Holocaust a "myth". This may lead Khamenei to take additional actions to reduce his firebrand President's negative impact. End comment.)

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Sharon as Peacemaker: Saudis Surprisingly Pragmatic
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10. (C) The delegation visited Israel earlier in their trip, and shared their views with the King on developments there. Senator Carper asked the King's reaction to PM Sharon's decision to leave the Likud party to form a new centrist party, which would include Shimon Peres, and was purportedly dedicated to advancing the Roadmap. The King asked if Sharon's change of approach may find parallels with a changed American approach to Israel-PA peace, to which Senator Carper replied that the U.S. sees PA Prime Minister Abbas as a partner in peace and emphasized that he needed support. Senator Carper also thanked the King for Saudi Arabia's financial support to the Palestinian Authority. The King replied that he looked forward to America's growing engagement with the PA.

11. (C) The Crown Prince outlined the SAG views on Israel-Palestine in detail. He began by recounting Saudi efforts at the Arab League summit in 2003, which enjoyed broad support in the Arab League and internationally, to advance a peace proposal that had foundered under Israeli objections. He also regretted Israeli opposition to another Saudi peace proposal from 2000 which called for a UN or American force to be stationed in the Occupied Territories to support progress on peace negotiations. If Israel had not rejected these two proposals, Prince Sultan added, the region could have avoided the difficulties of the recent past. The Crown Prince continued that the SAG feared that Israel would adopt similar obstructionism to delay implementation of the Roadmap. Speaking frankly, he confided that he did not feel the Israelis or the Palestinians were comfortable living under current conditions.

12. (C) Senator Carper agreed, noting that Sharon had left Likud exactly because he felt it could never be part of a lasting solution for peace. Carper added that twenty years ago, those advocating a two-state solution were considered extremists, and that now PM Sharon was adopting this approach. The Crown Prince replied that, without doubt, Ariel Sharon was a clever and courageous man. It was these two characteristics that led him to tour the al-Qods mosque which began the current intifada. Now Sharon was able to correct this mistake and move in a direction which serves Israel and the Israeli people.

13. (C) The Foreign Minister also accepted the Sharon decision as a positive development, but noted that it was important that the Palestinian people's financial situation improve dramatically for peace to have a chance. Senator Carper replied that the U.S. was providing increasing amounts of aid to the PA and enhancing contacts with the Palestinian business community. Al-Faisal replied that Israel must forthrightly face the conditions that the Palestinians now

endured, which the FM described as living at "sub-subsistence levels", dependency, and economic isolation. This, concluded Al-Faisal, for the best educated population in the Arab world. Carper replied that the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and subsequent opening of the Refah crossing were positive steps in this direction. The FM agreed, and commended the Secretary of State for her laudable achievement in helping to

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brokered this breakthrough. The FM concluded this discussion by noting that Saudi Arabia would support the PA, and that "if Sharon comes to us with a peaceful plan, we'll support him".

14. (C) Comment: All Saudi interlocutors called for greater engagement between the SAG and the U.S. Congress, and welcomed more such visits in the future. Post strongly endorses this view. Not only will such engagement help in formulating and executing informed bilateral and regional USG policies, it will assist in mobilizing the Saudi leadership and the Saudi Majles al-Shura to adopt a more substantive role for the Majles in deliberations of national policy. While the Majles lacks the institutional weight of other centers of power, particularly because it lacks the presence of Saudi royalty among its membership, it is the body best positioned - with adequate support from senior Saudi leadership - to integrate institutionally regional democratization movements into Saudi society. End comment.

15. (U) Codel Hagel departed post immediately after meetings and was unable to clear this message.
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